

## Fifth Annual Youth Entrepreneurial Success Summit Another Hit

Ask over 100 Black Belt teens how the fifth annual Youth Entrepreneurial Success (YES) Summit was, and they might answer, “Blamtastic!”

The summit, a project of the University of West Alabama’s Small Business Development Center and the Alabama Black Belt Commission’s Small Business Development Committee, was held on the UWA campus on April 30<sup>th</sup> and featured Renee Sandler, CEO of Blamtastic, as the morning keynote speaker. Sandler traveled from Atlanta to tell students about the lip balm and skincare company she started in 2007 with her then nine- and ten-year-old daughters. The trio began making lip balms in their kitchen and selling them in the local schoolyard before renting a mall kiosk. The girls later pitched their product to Walmart for their “Made in America” campaign. Blamtastic now has seventeen products in Walmart stores across the country as well as products in Walgreens and other retail outlets.

Sandler’s advice to young entrepreneurs? “Be brave and take chances,” she said. “You already have everything you need to make your dreams come true.” Sandler also recommended Coursera.org, which offers free online courses from top universities, as a way to gain business knowledge.

Other presenters included BBC committee chairman Donald Mills, who led a session on dining etiquette and the boys’ breakout session entitled “Think Tank,” and BBC project manager Ginger Stewart, who led the girls’ breakout session on the basics of business ownership.

The luncheon keynote speaker was Robert Armstrong of G-Momma’s Cookies, a Selma-based company. Armstrong’s best advice? “Figure out where your focus should be instead of going 900 different ways at 900 miles per hour,” he said. He explained that if he had the opportunity to go back and begin his business all over again, he would have planned more specifically where he wanted to sell his product rather than trying many different outlets at once. Armstrong told students that keys to doing well in business include attitude, ability, and the desire to learn quickly. He also stressed the importance of other people: mentors, encouragers, and listeners. It is helpful, he explained, to have people who are willing to be honest with you.

Students left the event ready to make their mark in the business world. Said Annie Ellis, the mother of a middle schooler who attended, “My son and his friend left the final session making plans to start their own website-building business!”